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Report of the seventy-third meeting of the Standing Committee (19-20 September 2018)

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I. Introduction

1. The Chairperson of the Executive Committee, Her Excellency Ambassador Suraya DALIL (Afghanistan), chaired the meeting.

II. Adoption of the agenda

2. The agenda for the meeting (EC/69/SC/CRP.16) was adopted.

III. Management, financial control, administrative oversight and human resources

3. The Deputy High Commissioner provided an overview of key issues related to management, including "duty of care" in high-risk situations, efforts to prevent and address sexual misconduct, risk management, oversight, and budgets and funding. She updated the Committee on UNHCR's change process, which sought to ensure that the organization strengthened efficiency, transparency and accountability; engaged with a broad spectrum of partners, particularly development actors, to foster solutions; and aligned itself with system-wide reforms and initiatives. In 2019, the Office was focusing on strengthening internal coherence, including measures to ensure greater field support provided by Headquarters. A regionalization and decentralization plan was also being developed, which would strengthen operations and decision-making in the field.

A. Finance and oversight

(i) Report of the Board of Auditors

4. UNHCR's financial statements for 2017, as contained in the report of the Board of Auditors (A/AC.96/1179 and A/73/5/Add.6), were presented jointly by the Controller and Director of the Division of Financial and Administrative Management, and the Deputy Director of External Audit Germany. The Controller noted that UNHCR had received an unqualified audit opinion, with confirmation that UNHCR's financial position remained strong and that there were sufficient assets to meet the liabilities. He briefed the Committee on the main recommendations made by the Board and the key measures taken in response (A/AC.96/1179/Add.1), including to recommendations from previous years.

5. The Deputy Director of External Audit Germany noted that this was the first time that UNHCR's external auditor briefed the Committee directly, which was a good measure in terms of increased transparency beyond consideration of the Board's report by the United Nations Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) and the General Assembly's Fifth Committee. With respect to the unqualified audit opinion, this was very positive but did not mean there was no room for improvement. With this in mind, the Board had made 49 new recommendations. Most of them concerned the administration and management of UNHCR's operations and focused on five areas: 1) fraud and corruption, 2) cash-based interventions (CBIs), 3) the use of individual consultants, 4) supply chain management, and 5) engagement in the sustainable development goals (SDGs). The latter was considered a key issue for the Board, and every organization's engagement in the SDGs had been examined with a view to strengthening commitments across the United Nations system.

6. Delegations noted with concern that 40 per cent of the recommendations from the previous year remained open, and UNHCR was urged to address these and all new recommendations in a timely manner. Appreciation was expressed for the detailed matrices provided, which allowed for tracking achievements and challenges in implementing the recommendations and provided greater transparency. In terms of financial management, UNHCR was urged to implement the additional controls recommended by the Board. Delegations took note of the challenges presented by earmarked funding and less than ideal predictability, affecting financial management, and called for this to be addressed by UNHCR's donors.

7. With respect to fraud and corruption, delegations noted that UNHCR operated in a high-risk environment but that it had good policies and systems in place for prevention and detection. Nevertheless, support was expressed for the Board's recommendation that UNHCR country operations strengthen risk assessment, including localized and customized anti-fraud and anti-corruption strategies. UNHCR was also advised to develop a clear control framework to strengthen its approach to fraud and risk management, which would help address some of the issues outlined in the report, including with respect to country-level fraud.

8. Regarding CBIs, UNHCR was encouraged to improve its monitoring, better measure the effectiveness of its training and ensure more consistent implementation in the field. It was also urged to work with partners on common policies and procedures, and concern was expressed over the fact that UNHCR did not track cash assistance distributed through partners. More broadly, numerous delegations highlighted the issue of partnership management, expressing concern that this was a systemic issue, which had also been identified by the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS). UNHCR was strongly urged to implement the relevant recommendations as a matter of priority.

9. The Office was encouraged to continuing exploring ways to work more cost-effectively with a "value for money" approach, in order to ensure optimal use of resources and funding. This included with respect to supply chain management. Delegations welcomed UNHCR's intention to review its work in the area of supply chain management and to further explore further collaboration with partners, which was consistent with the "grand bargain" commitments and the Secretary-General's reforms. With respect to individual consultant contracts, non-compliance with UNHCR's own policy was a cause for concern, as was the use of consultants to cover regular functions. Although support was expressed for the Office's engagement with SDGs, one delegation questioned the Board's recommendations, noting that UNHCR was a humanitarian agency.

10. In response to a question about the revision of UNHCR's results-based management (RBM) system and the timeline for implementation, the Deputy High Commissioner noted that the project had been put on hold. This was largely due to the rollout of the comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF) and other factors related to change management and broader reforms in the United Nations, all of which required a recalibration to ensure that the RBM system was fully aligned. Once finalized, it was expected to achieve greater focus on outcomes and impact, with strengthened design and accountability in the field.

11. The Controller reiterated UNHCR's commitment to implementing the Board's recommendations, including from prior years. In response to concern about due diligence in the area of implementing partnership management, he outlined the selection process, the various controls that had been put in place over the years and UNHCR's work with several audit companies to strengthen oversight. He noted that this was a high-risk area, but assured the Committee that there were many checks and balances in place, including oversight by the Board of Auditors. He also described the various measures UNHCR was taking to deter fraud and corruption, reiterating that UNHCR took this issue very seriously. The Controller described UNHCR's efforts to increase efficiencies, including through the United Nations Innovation Network, and in the context of CBIs, gave examples of how UNHCR was working with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) to align approaches. The Deputy Director of External Audit Germany acknowledged the concerns raised regarding the SDGs but reiterated the importance of this overarching effort of the United Nations system and the need for UNHCR to formulate a position on its engagement.

(ii) Internal audit

12. The Chief of the UNHCR Audit Service of OIOS, presented the report on internal audit for the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018 (A/AC.96/1181), noting that it did so with the sufficient resources required and with no interference that would have impeded its independence. He also highlighted the close and regular cooperation with UNHCR senior management and the Inspector General's Office (IGO). During the reporting period, OIOS conducted 28 audits and issued 133 recommendations, 11 of which were considered critical. There were also a number of recommendations that remained open from previous years, and OIOS had undertaken a review of two recurrent issues raised in past reports: 1) accounts payable, and 2) distribution of non-food

items (NFIs). In addition, OIOS had conducted two advisory engagements related to enterprise risk management (ERM) and a number of thematic audits, including on education grant entitlements, shelter programmes, registration and case management, and staff accommodation in the field.

13. Delegations appreciated the positive impact of the integration of the UNHCR Audit Service in the organization's overall oversight architecture and of the new interface with the IGO. While delegations welcomed the progress made in implementing many of the recommendations made by OIOS, it expressed concern about the number of outstanding ones, particularly those considered critical, and about several systemic issues that had been raised over and over again by the various control bodies. In this context, UNHCR was encouraged to consider providing matrices for follow-up purposes on the OIOS recommendations, just as it did for the Board of Auditors, which would highlight more than just the critical ones contained in the report. Alternatively, UNHCR could provide a consolidated matrix of issues coming from the audit and oversight bodies, given the overlapping issues. The two systemic issues which drew most attention were implementing partner management, and vendor management and procurement. UNHCR was urged to address the underlying causes of these issues as a matter of priority and to ensure that there were strong safeguards in place.

14. Responding to a question about the estimated completion dates, the Chief of the UNHCR Audit Service noted that the original dates set did not change. However, UNHCR was encouraged to provide new target dates when the original dates were not met. He also indicated that OIOS had strived over the years to make the recommendations less prescriptive and more flexible for management in terms of how to implement them.

15. The Deputy High Commissioner detailed the various levels of follow-up that were taking place, including at the highest levels of the organization, in order to implement the various recommendations but also acknowledged some of the complexities and challenges involved. She noted that the Inspector General had proposed that UNHCR undertake a "deep dive" to examine some of the recurrent issues. Other initiatives under way, such as risk management 2.0, would also help management follow up much more quickly on the implementation of recommendations. The Deputy High Commissioner briefed the Committee on a number of measures being taken to address the recommendations from some of the thematic audits. On staff accommodation, for example, UNHCR was preparing to issue a new administrative instruction which would respond to the recommendations. This would also be facilitated by the regionalization of various human resources functions. Regarding the status of UNHCR's registration software programme, proGres version 4, she noted that this had been rolled into PRIMES (Population Registration Identity Management EcoSystem), a new suite of interoperable registration, identity and case management tools. While the number of new rollout countries had increased in 2018, funding shortfalls had limited UNHCR's ability to implement it fully. The Controller informed the Committee that several recommendations which had been highlighted by delegations were already seeing progress made, with several being closed. This included one on local accounts receivable, on which UNHCR had issued a revised guidance note for field operations.

(iii) Report of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee

16. The outgoing Chairperson of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (IAOC) introduced the incoming Chairperson and informed delegations that three new members had taken up their functions in June 2018, replacing the members whose tenure had ended the month before. He presented the Committee's sixth annual report, covering the period 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018 (EC/69/SC/CRP.17), outlining the IAOC's review and recommendations with regard to: oversight and fraud prevention; UNHCR's internal control framework; ERM; change management; financial management; performance and accountability; organizational structures; and information technology processes.

17. Delegations concurred with the view that UNHCR had made progress in strengthening its oversight and risk management processes, as well as its evaluation and investigation capacities. However, they expressed concern about identified weaknesses with regards to accountability and supported the recommendation to strengthen UNHCR's internal control framework. UNHCR was encouraged to broaden its donor base to reduce the risks related to relying on only a few donors. Delegations also welcomed UNHCR's strategy and action plan to eliminate sexual exploitation

and abuse. With regard to fraud prevention, the Office was urged to adopt a more streamlined approach, and UNHCR was asked about the reasons behind the low participation of staff in the e-learning course on fraud prevention.

18. With regard to the recommendation for UNHCR to appoint a Senior Adviser on fraud prevention, the Chairperson explained that the IAOC felt it was necessary to strengthen the coordination of the different fraud prevention actions at the level of UNHCR's senior management. Responding to a question about the need for an adequate level of resources for the Inspector General's Office and a reasonable number of evaluations, the Chairperson responded that it was up to UNHCR to determine this, taking into account its objectives and available budget. He also noted that the Inspector General's Office had received additional staff and a budget increase for 2019. The Deputy High Commissioner clarified that additional resources would be needed to strengthen work in these areas, including to undertake more proactive investigations. She also noted that the e-learning course on fraud prevention was now mandatory for the entire workforce.

B. Risk management in UNHCR

19. UNHCR's Chief Risk Officer presented the paper on risk management (EC/69/SC/CRP.18), updating the Committee on the actions taken by UNHCR to strengthen the way it manages risk. The risk management 2.0 initiative, launched nearly one year ago, aimed to enhance the culture of risk management in operations and all areas of management. She presented the work plan for the coming three years, reiterated the commitment of UNHCR's senior management to achieving a strong risk management culture across the entire organization and highlighted the strong foundations already in place to achieve this.

20. Delegations expressed their support for UNHCR's efforts in this area and for the risk management 2.0 initiative in particular. While the additional capacity created in certain high-profile operations was appreciated, several delegations stressed the need for integrating risk reviews in the planning processes and day-to-day management. The importance of training for staff to embed risk management in the organization was highlighted. One delegation stressed the importance of having protocols and guidance in place on how to share critical risk information with partners and donors, when appropriate.

21. The Chief Risk Manager thanked delegations for their support. She agreed with the need to embed risk management in the organization and noted the need for a cultural change in this regard. She outlined some of the training initiatives that were underway, with the ultimate goal of strengthening the capacity of staff in all operations to better manage risks. She also confirmed that a risk review will be included in the planning instructions for 2019. The Deputy High Commissioner noted that risk management touched on everything that the organization did. In response to a question on registration, she announced that in follow up to a recommendation of OIOS, a consultant was hired to look at the registration process in general. Answering a question about the increase of the number of allegations, she responded that this was due to the fact that the complaint mechanisms now involved partners, not just UNHCR.

C. Human resources

(i) Human resources including staff welfare

22. The Director of the Division of Human Resources Management (DHRM) presented the paper on human resources, including staff welfare (EC/69/SC/CRP.19), providing an overview of UNHCR's workforce and the latest developments in this area. She briefed the Committee on the new administrative instruction on high-risk duty stations, the external review of human resources, finalized in March 2018, and the three-year road map that was adopted in response. The Committee was also updated on the new recruitment and assignments policy and the numerous initiatives taken to achieve gender parity, as well as a diverse, gender-balanced leadership pool, in line with the Secretary-General's reform agenda. Other efforts in the areas of performance management and staff accommodation were also presented.

23. The Committee commended UNHCR on efforts to achieve gender parity and welcomed the increase of international female staff appointed since the implementation of the new recruitment and assignments policy. While the increased diversity in UNHCR's workforce was noted, a few delegations expressed concern that some regions were still underrepresented and urged the organization to increase efforts to ensure geographical diversity. Delegations welcomed the strategy and concrete actions taken to address the issue of sexual exploitation, harassment and abuse, in particular the high-level attention accorded to the issue and the zero tolerance policy adopted by the Office. The Committee asked for further clarifications regarding the role of the planned regional human resources teams and whether there would be any financial implications. In light of the CRRF and expected endorsement of the global compact on refugees, UNHCR was asked whether it foresaw the need for any new training and skill sets. The Committee requested more information about the factors under consideration for UNHCR's leadership competency framework aligned with the Secretary-General's reform efforts. The Office was also urged to make sure that staff serving in the field had access to adequate accommodation, as well as medical and psychosocial care, including on their return.

24. The Director ensured the Committee that UNHCR would continue to provide regular updates on the implementation of the recommendations from the human resources review. In terms of budget implications, this had already been included in the annual programme review and implementation would start in January 2019. She provided more details on the planned regionalization of human resources functions, noting that this would need to be aligned with the broader institutional decentralization efforts. She also highlighted that this would also have a positive impact on the efforts to achieve geographical balance in the work place, including through career outreach and talent identification, as well as on ensuring "duty of care". In this context, the Director described a number of initiatives to improve staff accommodation. Concerning gender equity among national staff, she explained that the high number of male drivers and staff in the fields of supply management and security had an adverse effect on the Office's efforts in this area. She also described UNHCR's work to strengthen performance management, career development and leadership, as well as a new initiative to improve workforce planning in response to developments such as the CRRF and the global compact on refugees.

(ii) Staff safety and security

25. The Director of the Division of Emergency, Safety and Supply (DESS) presented the paper on staff safety and security (EC/69/SC/CRP.20), summarizing the challenging security environment in which the organization operated. He also provided an update on the progress made in implementing UNHCR's security strategy, stressing the need to cooperate closely with governments and local communities, upon which UNHCR relied to ensure the safety of its workforce.

26. Delegations commended the commitment of UNHCR staff in the field and expressed concern over the high number of security incidents. It supported measures to mitigate the risks, in particular the organization's proactive approach through the security action plan. UNHCR was also congratulated for its efforts in ensuring compliance with the United Nations minimum operating security standards (MOSS). The Committee expressed appreciation for the special consideration given by UNHCR to addressing gender-based threats and training for staff in this area.

27. The Director expressed gratitude for the Committee's support and numerous recommendations put forward. In response to questions about trends in the risks faced, he noted while UNHCR evaluated security developments on a daily basis, predictions were difficult to make. The support of States and local communities was, however, a key factor in being able to address the risks. The Director also noted that UNHCR was planning to recruit a specialist on gender-related threats to better mainstream this issue in women's security awareness trainings. He also stressed the commitment to enhance gender and geographical diversity in hiring staff security personnel. The Head of the Field Security Service provided clarifications about the different types of security incidents faced and noted that the decrease in the number of casualties and deaths from security incidents indicated a return on the investments made in terms of risk mitigation. He also informed the Committee that UNHCR regularly shared security resources, including information and training, with partners.

IV. Programme budgets and funding

A. Update on budgets and funding

28. The Controller and Director of the Division of Financial and Administrative Management, and the Director of the Division of External Relations jointly presented the update on budgets and funding for 2018 (EC/69/SC/CRP.21). The Controller noted that the initial figure of $7.5 billion approved by the Executive Committee in October 2017 had been revised to more than $8.2 billion as of mid-September. The upward adjustment resulted from the establishment of supplementary budgets amounting to $712 million to cover unforeseen needs in eight emergency situations. Since the issuance of the update on budgets and funding, there had been an increase of $503 million in voluntary contributions made available. However, the funding gap was still projected at 45 per cent by year-end. The Director of the Division of External Relations further described the funding situation, noting that there was a higher level of uncertainty in 2018 due to the timing of contributions. With the projected funds available for 2018, estimated to reach some $4 billion, approximately 55 per cent of the needs of persons of concerns would be met. The Director thanked donors for their generosity and stressed that flexible funding was key to responding to emergencies and chronically underfunded situations. He also took the opportunity to provide an update on UNHCR's involvement with the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI).

29. The Committee expressed concern about the continuing gap between the budget and funding received and inquired about the measures being taken to address it. In particular, numerous delegations highlighted the chronic underfunding of the programmes in Africa, despite it having the largest proportion of persons of concern and pioneering the application of the CRRF. UNHCR was called upon to strengthen efforts to mobilize resources for the implementation of the CRRF, as this would help ensure outcomes were attained and encourage other countries to apply it. Disappointment was expressed over the lack of reduction in the per capita costs through efficiency gains, particularly in relation to the implementation of cash assistance and the "grand bargain" initiative. Donors were encouraged to increase their share of unearmarked contributions to provide greater flexibility in meeting the most urgent needs, in line with the "grand bargain" commitments. UNHCR was also urged to continue to broaden its donor base, including engagement with new and emerging donors, as the humanitarian donor landscape was not as diverse as it could be. With respect to development cooperation, States stressed how such forms of assistance should be additional to humanitarian assistance and should be focused on achieving national priorities. Delegations expressed support for UNHCR's progress in joining IATI.

30. One delegation expressed concern about the protracted situation of the Sahrawi refugees living in the five camps in Tindouf, Algeria, highlighting the suffering of the population in the absence of a durable solution. It commended the efforts made to assess the needs of the refugees and mobilize the necessary resources, and took note with appreciation of the findings of the UNHCR expert mission team to update the information concerning the vulnerabilities and needs of the Sahrawi refugees. It also stressed the importance of the right to voluntary return and noted that the registration of the Sahrawi refugees was directly linked to the implementation of the United Nations peace plan. Another delegation expressed concern about the refusal to register the refugee population in the Tindouf camps; reaffirmed that the central and essential character of registration and census of the population, consistent with UNHCR's protection mandate, was confirmed by numerous Executive Committee conclusions; and underscored the important link between registration and the evaluation of real needs. It pointed out that multiple diversions of aid had been confirmed by reports of international organizations. The delegation launched a new appeal for UNHCR to proceed with the registration, in accordance with its mandate for protection, assistance and durable solutions, and in conformity with relevant Security Council resolutions, highlighting that registration improved the integrity of UNHCR's interventions by diminishing the possibility of fraud and humanitarian aid diversion.

31. The Controller explained some of the financial considerations behind the reductions in pillar four - projects for internally displaced persons – which were related to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia, and linked to a number of factors, including logistics and security constraints. He also spoke about UNHCR's efforts to ensure a more robust internal financial control framework, which required strengthened accountability for the organization as a

whole. Regarding the per capita costs, the explained the challenges involved but indicated that UNHCR was looking to manage down. The Director of the Division of External Relations explained that while the budget was increasing, it was important to keep in mind that displacement was growing at a much higher rate. She emphasized efforts to diversify the donor base and agreed that development funding should not be used to meet the humanitarian needs. Responding to a question about multi-year funding, the Director noted that the amount of such contributions remained small and tightly earmarked, which made assessing the benefits difficult.

32. The decision on budgets and funding for 2018, contained in annex VIII of EC/69/SC/CRP.21, was deferred.

B. Biennial programme budget for 2018-2019 (revised)

33. The Controller presented the revised biennial programme budget for 2018-2019 (A/AC.96/1180) and highlighted the key recommendations in the report of the ACABQ[1]. He provided an overview of the budget figures, including by region and by pillar, noting that the additional needs in 2018 had been mainstreamed into the revised budget for 2019. Trends related to budget, funds available and expenditure between 2010 and 2017 confirmed UNHCR's capacity to implement. He also highlighted that UNHCR had been able to more than halve its headquarters expenditure when compared to its total expenditure over the course of the past ten years

34. Delegations expressed appreciation for the informal consultative meetings on the budget in July and August, which provided an opportunity to discuss the details of the document. Nevertheless, UNHCR was urged to provide greater clarity on UNHCR's prioritization methodology and transparency with respect to how decisions were made. UNHCR was also urged to analyse the way in which it built its budget in order to find a better balance in terms of assessing overall needs, yet taking into account expected donor contributions and controlling costs. The Office was encouraged to continue to prioritize needs based on vulnerability and to ensure that the five core directions were taken into account (including with respect to engaging more decisively in situations of internal displacement). At the same time, UNHCR was cautioned against responding to the needs of a broader range of people as it could undermine the programmes that fall within its core mandate. States also highlighted the importance of outlining how new approaches, including the "grand bargain" and the CRRF, were reflected in the budget.

35. Responding to a question on the review of the 7 per cent programme support cost policy, the Controller outlined the criteria on which the policy was based and added that UNHCR would continue undertaking its review and be ready to share findings as early as 2019. With respect to the potential costs associated with an increase in allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, he explained that UNHCR prepared an "investing in integrity package" that outlined internal measures designed for such cases.

36. The Deputy High Commissioner took note of comments on the budget process and indicated that UNHCR would continue to keep the Committee abreast of the linkages with other initiatives as well as with UNHCR's change process. She also explained that country operations planning was an important pillar of building the budget and that the role of country operations would be strengthened with UNHCR's shift towards a regionalization approach. In response to questions about UNHCR's strategic directions and how these were reflected in the budget, she described UNHCR's commitment to engaging in the response to internal displacement and the internal transformation process to ensure UNHCR's workforce had the skills to work effectively in inter-agency coordination settings. She also highlighted efforts to prioritize situations as needs emerged and underscored the importance of unearmarked funding in this regard.

[1] The report of the ACABQ was provided to the Committee as an advance version and would be issued in due course as A/AC.96/1180/Add.1.

C. Private sector fundraising

37. The Head of the Private Sector Partnerships (PSP) Service presented the paper on private sector fundraising and partnerships (EC/69/SC/CRP.22) and gave an overview of the income growth to date. He noted that UNHCR had achieved strong income growth in the last 10 years and outlined how the organization planned to fulfil its ambitious target of obtaining $1 billion in private sector income by 2025.

38. Delegations congratulated UNHCR for the growth in private sector contributions and welcomed the efforts to bring down the cost of private sector fundraising to 25 per cent or below. They noted that the CRRF and the global compact on refugees presented an opportunity for UNHCR to involve the private sector. There was also a suggestion for UNHCR to explore collaboration with local companies in developing countries, especially with regard to investments, technology and innovation, and job-generating opportunities. The Committee queried what kind of policy was in place to ensure due diligence and to avoid potential conflicts of interest with private donors in order to minimize reputational and financial risks.

39. The Head of PSP thanked the Committee for its support and explained that UNHCR planned to bring the cost below 25 per cent through economies of scale related to market growth and by keeping headquarters' costs at a minimum. UNHCR would continue to report to the Committee on this issue. He informed the Committee that the main areas of strategic investment were related to digital and mobile communications, and analytics and profiling of donors. Face-to-face fundraising, which remained the most cost effective way to acquire regular donors and unearmarked donations in many countries, also required further investment. Regarding the CRRF and the global compact on refugees, he agreed that this had broadened UNHCR's scope with respect to engagement with the private sector. In response, an Operational Partnerships Unit had been established and would work closely with the Division of Resilience and Solutions.

40. The Head of PSP also spoke about a number of initiatives underway, including possible joint campaigns on underfunded situations and a cash assistance campaign. In terms of managing risks, he explained that UNHCR had a due diligence policy and that there was a committee chaired by the Deputy High Commissioner which was responsible for reviewing all partnerships involving contributions of more than $100,000. He also noted that UNHCR was supporting the development of a common due diligence policy within the United Nations system. The Director of the Division of External Relations also commented that UNHCR was seeing a shift from a social corporate responsibility approach to one that reflected a willingness to become strategic partners on innovative projects. She also noted that the role of the due diligence committee would be expanded to look at the strategic value of partnerships.

V. Coordination

A. Oral update on the comprehensive refugee response framework

41. The Director of the Division of Resilience and Solutions presented the oral update on the CRRF, briefing the Committee on recent developments and progress made in its application in 15 countries across Africa, the Americas and Asia, as well as in the context of two regional situations. He highlighted the continuing importance of partnerships, particularly with development actors, as well as the identification of synergies with other efforts, including internal change processes, the SDGs and ongoing reforms of the United Nations more broadly.

42. Delegations welcomed the progress being made, with some calling for the CRRF to be applied to all major refugee situations. While the CRRF had mainly focused on host countries to date, the need to apply it to countries of origin in the pursuit of solutions was highlighted. In this context, Afghanistan's recent announcement to implement the CRRF for returnees was welcomed. The lessons learned from this situation would be valuable to other countries where returns were being pursued. Numerous delegations referred to UNHCR's crucial role as a catalyst and convener of various actors in support of the CRRF objectives. In this context, the Office was urged to be a "thought leader", particularly in ensuring the centrality of protection in all responses. While support for the "whole of society" approach was conveyed, the Committee noted that

significant work still needed to be done to educate a wide range of actors about what this concept meant and how they could contribute to it.

43. Despite the progress highlighted, some delegations highlighted a number of areas for improvement. One pointed to the need for strengthened government ownership across relevant line ministries; senior level engagement from host countries; long-term responses that focused on development initiatives, alongside humanitarian support; and for the right actors to be brought together at an early stage. Another indicated that multi-stakeholder engagement and proper coordination mechanisms were still lacking in most CRRF countries, and that international support was lagging behind.

44. Lessons learned should not only mean refinements and course corrections in the country concerned but should also lead to improved understandings shared across the CRRF network as a whole in terms of how to do things better and faster. While the continuous improvement of the CRRF portal and recent addition of the CRRF toolkit were welcome in this regard, regret was expressed that the CRRF Reference Group was no longer active. The importance of data collection and analysis was also highlighted. UNHCR was asked to ensure that donor countries were kept regularly informed and engaged at the country level, as they were ready to play supporting roles.

45. Looking ahead to implementation of the proposed global compact on refugees, some delegations referred to the need to make a shift from the CRRF rollout to a new global way of working. UNHCR was encouraged to define the criteria for the activation and deactivation of context-specific "support platforms", and a roadmap for implementation should be made available before the first global refugee forum in 2019. The platforms would help kick-start a CRRF-type response in the respective country or region. There was also a call for a strong monitoring and accountability framework to be established going forward.

46. The Director of the Division of Resilience and Solutions commended the contributions of the CRRF rollout countries and noted how important it was to keep the momentum going. With respect to the way forward, he indicated that the CRRF would be absorbed into the global compact on refugees and would provide an important opportunity to see the approach expanded at the global level. At the same time, dedicated engagement with the rollout countries would need to be maintained. Responding to a question about the role of the new Division, he indicated that now was the moment for the organization as a whole to take ownership of the process and to ensure that UNHCR's work more broadly was in line with the CRRF objectives. He assured the Committee that UNHCR would continue to play a catalytic role in mobilizing the support required. The Director thanked the Committee for its support and promised to follow-up with interested delegations on the many proposals put forward.

B. Oral update on the grand bargain

47. The Director of the Division of External Relations presented the oral update on the "grand bargain", highlighting a number of key developments on the 10 workstreams. She noted the continuing value of the "grand bargain" as a unique platform through which donor governments, United Nations agencies and other partners could come together with the ultimate goal of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian aid.

48. Delegations welcomed the update and UNHCR's continued commitment to the "grand bargain". Nonetheless, some delegations expressed concern about the inconsistent progress among the participants. With regard to UNHCR, the Committee commended the organization on the progress made, including with respect to IATI. The participation of UNHCR in the pilot project for a common donor reporting framework, as well as the progress made on developing multi-year multi-partner strategies, building local partner capacities and creating efficiencies in partnership management alongside other United Nations agencies were also seen as positive steps forward. UNHCR was urged to continue working towards achieving the greater participation of women and girls in leadership and management structures, as well as in decision-making. The Office was also encouraged to ensure better quality reporting, particularly in demonstrating measurable progress on joint needs assessments, which underpinned prioritized response plans and appeals and which reduced duplication and management costs.

49. The Director acknowledged the request for stronger reporting on UNHCR efforts in implementing the "grand bargain" commitments. She outlined the different types of joint needs assessments that took place, depending on the context. Responding to questions about the use of cash, she noted that more than 64 per cent was multi-purpose and that CBIs represented a little over 15 per cent of UNHCR's overall assistance in 2017. She also spoke about the challenges involved with respect to earmarking, which affected UNHCR's fundraising strategy and appeals process.

VI. Any other business

50. The Senior Coordinator for the Prevention of and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment provided an update on recent initiatives by the Office in this area. Delegations welcomed UNHCR's engagement and the progress achieved so far, including its efforts to ensure a system-wide approach. Responding to a question on a protocol for implementing partners, she described UNHCR's involvement in its drafting and work to enhance training, including at the field level. She noted that the increase in the number of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse were an indication of greater trust in UNHCR's ability to respond and reflected the increased level of engagement with partners. At the global level, joint investigations, involvement in inter-agency working groups and the development of a vetting and tracking tool within the United Nations system were major areas of UNHCR's work.

51. In line with previous practice, the Chairperson indicated that the draft report of the seventy third meeting of the Standing Committee would be circulated electronically by 25 September. Any comments or corrections from Member States in relation to their interventions should be submitted by 27 September. They would then be incorporated, as appropriate, and the report would be subsequently recirculated and considered adopted.